

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Really and truly, my heart goes out to those unfortunate Japanese people, the victims of the March 11 earthquake, measuring 8.90 on the Richter Scale, and the accompanying tsunami with 30-foot waves that took the lives of what appears to be at least 20,000 innocent Japanese. The actual death toll will never be known for certain, of course, because many of the victims were washed out to sea, their bodies, never to be found. The trouble with death is that it is so damned finite. There is no return from the dead, no matter what priests, rabbis and Holy people say. I shall die one day, I know that, and I, also, know that, after I am gone, some years later, people will have forgotten me, completely. People will not even remember the looks of Betty, the late wife of Bo-Bo, her froglike husband. Sad, is it not? Still, if one could instantly recall all of the events of the past, one would never be able to have a memory bank that was sufficiently large to store such a vast amount of information. It was taught to me when I was very young that one should never say anything but good about the dead because the dead cannot come back to defend themselves. I recall part of a poem, written more than 800 years ago:

*'A dead man oft is showered with praise
Who earned not such in all his days.
Yet, say nothing of the dead
Lest it be good –
As it should.
Praise be to God!
Love each and one another;
Then, sleep in peace eternal below diamond stars,
The ultimate bed: The ethereal soft cover.'*

It is said that it is better to praise a dead person for that which that person attempted and, perhaps, failed, than to denigrate that dead person, knowing fully well that that person is not able to defend himself or herself. The Japanese, we all know, have been responsible for some atrocious actions in years of yore, but those Japanese of yesteryear, for the most part, are no longer living. Only their children, or the children of those children, can vaguely remember those ancestors, who perpetrated those evil deeds in times gone by. We must not judge today's Japanese on the basis of their ancestors. We have to forgive the misdeeds of yesteryear, remembering those deeds, only, to guarantee that they are not replicated. The trouble is, as one notes in Libya, today, that, in fact, man never seems to learn sufficiently by the mistakes of past generations.

The Japanese people, who were the victims of the March 11 earthquake and the accompanying tsunami, deserve to be remembered with the ultimate amount of reverence that may be conjured for them, not for that which they failed to do, but for that which they attempted to do. We tend to criticise a person for his or her failures, forgetting that we, too, have failed in many of our vain attempts at creation and in the pursuit of wealth, during the course of our lifetimes. Criticism is cheap; it is so very easy to heap it on just about

anybody and anything. One could criticise, for instance, the creative works of Lewis Carroll, the name, being a pseudonym of Mr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, English author, mathematician, and logician, best known for his creation of the immortal fantasy, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. One does not hear very much about this gentleman who, during his lifetime, was a member of the Faculty of Mathematics at Oxford University. If you, My Dear Grandchild, have not read Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, then, you are missing a great deal because it is a wonderful work of art. However, as science today has come to learn, Professor Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was, probably, a paedophile and, in today's world, it is likely that he would have been investigated for the crime of paedophilia or gross indecency. But only the great works of Professor Charles Lutwidge Dodgson survive, today, and we cannot even suggest that he was a paedophile because he is not here to defend himself of such repulsive allegations. One could criticise, also, that great composer Richard Wagner, saying that, because he was a hater of many of the Jews of his day, one should not play his music. But, as soon as one listens to just 2 of his great works – Der Fliegende Holländer and Tristan und Isolde – one cannot but come away from the operas, humming the wonderful, lilting melodies, composed by this great musician of the 19th Century. Richard Wagner is not here to defend himself, but it has been suggested that he did not hate all of the Jews of the world, only those who lent him money and, when he could not repay the loans on time, these Jews intimidated him and tried – and, sometimes, succeeded – in sullyng his once good name. His works, however, will live for centuries to come in the same way that Alice's Adventures in Wonderland will continue to be a beloved story for all children ... or all ages.

Yes, criticism is cheap. It takes no great intelligence to criticise anybody and anything, however, it takes a great deal of intelligence to think rationally and learn to forgive the evil acts of yesteryear and linger more on the greatness of man as he struggles with himself to better himself. Let me finish this missive of today with a small piece of logic, written nearly a century ago:

'Once the realisation is accepted that, even between the closest human beings, infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living, side by side, can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them.'

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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